DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 682 RC 016 606

AUTHOR Roper, Susan Stavert
TITLE Consortium Support for Teachers in Rural Oregon.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Teachers; College School Cooperation; *Consortia; Educational Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Professional Development; Program Descriptions; Regional Laboratories; *Rural Education; Rural Schools; Shared Resources and Services; *Teacher Orientation
IDENTIFIERS *Josephine County School District OR; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory; Oregon; Southern Oregon State College; *Support Systems

ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1986, representatives from Southern Oregon State College, the Northwest Regional Laboratory, and the Josephine County School District formed a consortium to design an induction program for beginning rural teachers. During its first year, the consortium presented special on-site graduate credit courses addressing problems new teachers encountered, served as group facilitators for the new teachers, designed a mentor handbook and program, and enabled visits to top-rated teachers. Areas emerging as major concerns on which to focus the second year of the program included understanding school policies and procedures, managing time effectively, finding instructional materials and resources, learning about the informal organization of the school, interacting successfully with parents, motivating students, and teaching a wide range of students. Problems endemic to interorganizational collaboration which limited the scope and quality of the consortium's efforts included initial suspicion of one another, unclear expectations, unequal effort, and the difficulty of making induction a priority. Advice for future activities, obtained from reviewing literature of collaborative efforts, included building credibility through visibility, discussing/resolving differences in goal orientation, modifying goals and activities to meet the needs of all participants, communicating frequently, and developing patience. (NEC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED293682

CONSORTIUM SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS IN RURAL OREGON

Susan Stavert Roper

Southern Oregon State College

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Susan Stavert Roper

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 5-9, 1988, New Orleans, Louisiana.

CE 016606

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CONSORTIUM SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS IN RURAL OREGON

Susan Stavert Roper
Southern Oregon State College

Background

Beginning teachers often describe their first year of teaching ranging from strong feelings of inadequacy to "blind panic." (Griffin, 1982) All beginning teachers need support, but teachers in unfamiliar environments may need it the most. In the case of novice rural teachers, many come from urban and suburban backgrounds and must adjust to living a different lifestyle as well as starting a new career. The isolation, limited opportunity for social contacts, and "fish bowl" existence of their new environment add to the stress endemic to the first year of teaching. (Guenther and Weible, 1983)

New teachers need the opportunity to visit outstanding colleagues in schools similar to theirs and to get together with other beginning teachers. Long distances between schools and the small size of school faculties in rural areas are formidable obstacles to bringing teachers together. Transportation costs and time on the road make it difficult for novice teachers to participate in a support network. They miss out on the reassurance that their anxiety, exhaustion, and feelings of inadequacy are the common lot of first-year teachers, not proof

that they have chosen the wrong career. It should be no surprise that the attrition rate of new teachers in rural areas is a continuing problem.

In response to these problems, administrators in Josephine County, Oregon, a district covering 3200 square miles and including 15 schools with as much as 70 miles between them, began searching for a way to do a better job of supporting their new teachers.

At the same time, education faculty members at Southern Oregon State College were looking for a district which would allow them to work with beginning teachers. As part of a grant from the Northwest Laboratory for Educational Research (NWREL), faculty studied the literature about the plight of beginning teachers. When they come across Kevin Ryan's description of the abandonment of new teachers by teacher educators, the SOSC faculty agreed that it was all too accurate a description of themselves. Ryan says:

> The way teacher training institutions send new teachers out to the field always brings to my mind scenes from those old World War II movies. An idealistic recruit volunteers for the paratrooper corps. Veterans of former battles prepare them for the coming invasion. Chock-full of skills and weaponry after a few practice jumps, they are loaded aboard planes that take off and head into the skies over enemy territory. Once behind the lines, their instructors, with thumbs up and a gentle push, send them off into the inky blackness. Some float down, land gracefully, join the battle, and become heroes. Some have a gentle landing amid minefields and go up in a puff of smoke. Some get hung up in trees and church spires, easy prey to enemy guns. A few have a fast ride down and a short military career because their chutes don't open. And while all this bedlam and mayhem is happening, the trusty trainers are flying back to the base to induct another group of recruits. They rarely learn what happens to their recruits and how effective their training turned out to be. (Ryan, 1985, p. 240)

The SOSC faculty returned from the Lab convinced that it was time to find out how their recruits and graduates from other training programs were doing in action.

Professional development staff of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory were also on the lookout for colleges and schools interested in induction. The Lab had been awarded a grant to develop three models for inducting new teachers: one in an urban area, another in a Pacific rim community, and a third in a rural area. The interest of Southern Oregon State College and Josephine County in the plight of new teachers convinced the NWREL staff to locate the rural model in southern Oregon.

Consortium Profile

In the summer of 1986, representatives from Southern Oregon State College, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the Josephine County School District formed a consortium for the purpose of designing an induction program. Each member had something of real value to contribute.

College faculty brought information from the literature regarding the needs of beginning teachers and lessons from exemplary induction programs. They presented special courses to address particular problems new teachers encountered. These courses were offered on-site in the district and for graduate credit--no small incentive for a first-year teacher. In addition, faculty and college administrators served as group

facilitators for the new teachers, encouraging them to share their concerns and assist one another in a non-evaluative setting.

Working concurrently with the urban, Pacific rim, and rural induction projects, NWREL staff suggested strategies to the consortium which were working in the other sites. The NWREL staff designed a comprehensive mentor handbook and a first rate formative evaluation report of the first year of the project. Through the Lab connection, consortium members were able to meet with experts in the field of induction, among whom was Judith Warren-Little.

The school district staff provided access to teachers and administrators and released-time for beginning teachers to visit top-rated teachers. The personnel and curriculum coordinator of the school district was the prime mover in the project. He called all the meetings of the consortium, selected mentor teachers, planned visitations for beginning teachers, arranged for mentor teachers to observe and be observed, and negotiated with the college and NWREL for their respective services.

Consortium Successes

Through these joint efforts, consortium members can point to a number of successes. All beginning teachers visited some outstanding teachers within and outside the district. One of the best activities was a group observation and meeting with a few of the district's "super stars." During that meeting one

experienced teacher admitted to frequently feeling overwhelmed by the job. She confessed that just the previous week she was so tired of awakening early and worrying about unfinished work that she hopped in her car and drove over to the school at four o'clock in the morning. She worried that a cruising police officer might think she was breaking in. The beginning teachers were able to laugh with her and feel comfortable enough to share their own anxieties. As one said, "I'm so glad I'm not married, the only one I have time for at home is my cat." (Personal communication, Josephine County School District, December 3, 1986)

Perhaps the most worthwhile interchange of this session was when the veteran teachers told the beginners that sometimes it is okay to do what is easiest for the teacher. They suggested that new teachers look for activities that give students more responsibility, (e.g., debates, group projects and panel presentations), instead of continually making more work for themselves. The beginners left this session knowing that even the very best in their profession occasionally feel overwhelmed, but there are ways to gain more control over their time.

While the group visits and conferences were inspirational and cathartic, the essential mechanism for improving curriculum knowledge and instructional skills was the mentor-protégé relationship. Each new teacher was assigned a mentor. Mentors frequently observed their protégé's and shared a host of practical suggestions with them. Mentors also demonstrated exemplary lessons for the protégé to observe.

The professional development staff of the Northwest Lab and the Oregon State Department of Education provided training to the mentors. The NWREL Mentor Handbook served as a useful tool in acquainting mentors with their reponsibilities and suggesting ways to support new teachers.

Beginning teachers also met together without their mentors. This was a time for sharing their woes, airing personal as well as professional problems and giving each other ideas for surviving the first year.

The year before the consortium was formed, Burl Brim, a Southern Oregon State College professor, interviewed over forty new teachers and asked them what they wished they had known on their first day on the job. Their responses were organized into a checklist for administrators. Brim provided the checklist to principals in Josephine county. It reminded principals to acquaint their new teachers with everything a novice might need to know--from the mundane (e.g., bus schedules, dress codes, fire alarm drills) to the sublime (e.g., school philosophy, community profile, district curriculum guide).

Before the end of the first year of operation, the consortium agreed to make a comprehensive evaluation of the project. Many induction strategies the consortium tried came from this evaluation and were implemented to help new teachers in the second year of the program. Seven areas emerged as the major concerns:

- o Understanding school policies and procedures
- o Managing time effectively

- o Finding instructional materials and resources
- o Learning about the informal organization of the school
- o Interacting successfully with parents
- o Motivating students
- o Teaching a wide range of students

For each of these areas beginning teachers provided a list of specific problems they encountered and recommendations to address each problem. For example, to handle the problem that new teachers do not understand district policies and procedures, they recommended that district handbooks be mailed to new teachers prior to the beginning of school and that three or four orientation meetings be scheduled throughout the first two months. This suggestion seemed to work much better than the previous practice of trying to cover all orientation items in one long district-wide meeting held before school began--during the time that new teachers are anxious to get their classrooms organized.

The evaluation sessions were particularly helpful to college faculty in shaping the inservice agenda for new teachers. In response to the concerns about parent interaction, student motivation and teaching a wide range of students, college faculty designed a special course. The Classroom Survival Skills course focused on parent-teacher conferences, mainstreaming, motivating the reluctant learner and teaching students to become independent learners.

The result of all this activity is that the life of a first-year teacher in Josephine County, Oregon, has become a

little easier and consortium members are a little smarter about how to help people make the transition from student to teacher.

Consortium Problems

Despite these accomplishments, this consortium-based approach to the induction of rural teachers is by no means an unqualified success story. Problems endemic to interorganizational collaboration limit the scope and quality of the consortium's efforts. They include: initial suspicion of one another, unclear expectations, unequal effort, and the difficulty of making induction a priority.

Initial Suspicion:

Our consortium was fortunate in that the individuals representing each organization knew one another and had worked together on other projects. Nevertheless, anyone who has attempted to make collaboration between higher education and schools work knows that initial suspicions are inevitable. College faculty typically have little experience working as colleagues with public school personnel. Their contacts are usually limited to conducting research projects and supervising student teachers. Many college faculty believe that school people are so immersed in day-to-day problems that they are hostile to ideas and uninterested in developing long-range goals and programs. On the other hand, school people often believe that college

professors live in an unreal world of highly motivated students, impractical theories and dry statistics. (Hagberg and Walker, 1977)

In addition to the wariness the school and college people were feeling about one another, both groups had some doubts about the value of working with NWREL. They asked each other, "Will the staff from the Lab really understand the problems unique to our area?" "Will they assume that they have all the answers and we are unsophisticated 'country cousins'?" "Will they impose a research agenda that is irrelevant to our problems?"

While initial suspicion is eventually overcome by time and good will, it makes for a slow start.

Unclear Expectations:

Unclear expectations are a difficult problem to overcome. To this day, college and Lab staff wait to be invited to a consortium meeting or activity in the district. This is the case even though the consortium has never formally agreed that district members are expected to call meetings and set agendas.

Although consortium members communicate frequently, misunderstandings can still arise. For example, at the conclusion of the first year of the project, the school district member of the consortium asked college faculty and staff to facilitate an evaluation meeting with the district's beginning teachers. In the course of this

meeting some comments were made which were construed by one experienced teacher as critical of district policies. The district administrator was upset and skeptical about the value of the session. Fortunately, he immediately called consortium members at the college and Lab to voice his concerns. After reviewing the written report on the evaluation meetings, he became convinced that the criticism was constructive. In fact, the consortium used the report as a planning document for the following year's activities.

This incident had a happy ending, but, could have been disastrous. College faculty and Lab staff who facilitated the meeting were totally surprised by the district administrator's reaction. They thought they understood what was expected of them as facilitators and performed that role successfully. In retrospect, the facilitators realized that they were expected to be more sensitive to the district administrator's reluctance to have dirty laundry aired in "public."

Unequal Effort:

Unequal effort continues to plague the project. With the lack of funds to hire a project coordinator, the district's personnel and curriculum director has assumed this responsibility. To some degree this has happened because consortium members from the college and Lab see the district as "his territory" and are reluctant to intervene without his permission.

Sheer physical distances have also played a part in the unequal participation of consortium members. The college is an hour's drive from the district office and as much as two hours from some of the schools. The region served by the district is a four and one-half hour drive from the Northwest Lab.

The reward system in higher education does not encourage college faculty to devote their efforts to collaborative activity. Time spent in research which will lead to publication is a better investment for promotion and tenure than the considerable time commitment required to participate in a consortium with school people.

Low Priority of Induction:

Although the district consortium member has put in more time and effort into the project than have the members from the college and Northwest Lab, even he finds it difficult to make the induction program a priority. The district has suffered from political unrest and financial instability. Dealing with an attempt to recall school board members, suspension of bus services, and potentially severe reductions in force, leave little leeway for one more service to be managed from the director's office.

College faculty have also had their attention absorbed by the instructional and institutional demands of their jobs. The Northwest Lab member spends a good part of his life overseeing a variety of programs, both domestic and

abroad. This is only one of several programs in which he is involved. It often seems to consortium members that the induction program is not on the top of anyone's list.

Improving Interorganizational Collaboration

In reviewing some of the literature on collaborative efforts, it has been reassuring to know that the problems the consortium encountered are not unique. The literature has proven helpful in learning about specific advice for improving collaboration. This advice will serve as useful guidelines for future consortium activities.

First, the literature reminds college faculty that credibility is gained through visibility, familiarization with project participants and demonstrating the ability to be useful. Showing new teachers that they are familiar with and comfortable in the public school will make faculty more credible as workshop presentors and course instructors. A large part of building trust is simply to be there. Attending staff meetings, visiting classrooms, and eating lunch with the new teachers and their mentors, will help make college faculty a more welcome addition to the school landscape.

A second useful area the literature addresses is the impact of different goals on collaborative endeavors. A review of Gerald Pine's insightful paper, "The Certainty of Change Theory: An Analysis of Change Ideologies," warns that partners in collaborative educational projects rarely share the same goals.

He points out that conflict and resistance to change are no strangers to interorganizational collaboration, partly because of "the clash of legitimately different interests" (Pine, 1980).

In our consortium, the main goal of members from the school district was to improve the quality and retention of new teachers in their district. College representatives were not as concerned with that particular group of teachers as they were with learning more about the needs of beginning teachers in general. The college faculty wanted to know about the problems their graduates were likely to face in the near future so they could adjust their pre-service program to minimize those problems. The Lab's interests differed to some degree from those of the school district and the college. NWREL staff were interested in learning about the concerns of new teachers which were rooted in the rural experience and how they differed from problems new teachers in other environments were facing.

The literature admonishes partners in interorganizational collaboration endeavors not to ignore these legitimate differences in goal orientation. A full and frank discussion of differing goals should be held before any commitment is made to participate in a consortium. Once these differences of goals and interests are known, it becomes much easier to negotiate compromises and to anticipate potential conflict situations.

A third and related piece of advice is that goals and activities must be modified to meet the needs of all participants, but in cases where teachers and students are directly involved, school district members must make the final

decisions (Hagberg and Walker, 1977). Consortium members from an institution of higher education or another agency need to understand that collective bargaining, public relations or financial constraints in the district impose limitations on consortium plans.

A fourth bit of advice is that frequent communication is essential. Regularly scheduled meetings with clear agendas and minutes and written agreements for each inservice activity will keep consortium members informed and avoid misunderstandings. In some consortiums, members hammer out expectations for all participants and put these expectations in writing.

Finally, each member of a collaborative effort must learn that most difficult of all virtues---to be patient (Roper and Jung, 1980). The investment of time and effort necessary for a truly successful consortium is a big one, but so are the payoffs. Every teacher who went through the induction program designed by the consortium in 1986-87 returned the following year to teach in the same school district. School administrators report that these teachers are more knowledgeable about their school, district and community, more willing to become involved in school governance and activities, and generally appear happier and more comfortable in their jobs, than were beginning teachers from previous years.

College faculty are seeing an immediate payoff from their participation in the consortium as they plan a new teacher education program. Partly as a result of the concerns voiced by Josephine County's new teachers, the new Southern Oregon State

College program will have a longer period of student teaching, more carefully selected placements and better trained supervisors.

The payoff for the Northwest Lab is the contribution they can make to the knowledge-base about beginning teachers. NWREL staff are presently comparing the needs reported by new teachers in the urban, rural and Pacific Rim sites. They are also examining the characteristics of schools and districts which support or hinder induction efforts in these different settings.

The impact of the consortium's work is apparent in more confident first-year teachers, a better designed teacher education program and increased knowledge about the lives of beginning teachers. The hope of all consortium members is that together we can help ensure that the "fittest" not merely the most persistent will survive in the teaching profession.

REFERENCES

Griffin, Gary, Induction - An Overview. Beginning Teacher Induction - Five Dilemmas. Invited Symposium, AERA, 1982.

Guenther, John and Tom Weible. Preparing Teachers for Rural Schools. Research in Rural Education, Volume 2, Winter 1983.

Habgerg, Hilma and Decker Walker. The Problems of Collaboration in when Teachers and Researchers Cooperate edited by Daniel Duke, Stanford Center for Research on a Development in Teaching, October, 1977.

Pine, Gerald. The Certainty of Change Theory: An Analysis of Change Ideologies. Paper presented at the Teacher Corps Research Adaptation Cluster Conference Boston, Massachusetts, April 1980.

Roper, Susan and Richard Jung. Initiating Staff Development Under Fire: A Project Learns to Adapt A Journal of Research Adaptation Teacher Corps, Journal II July, 1980.

Ryan, Kevin. Beginning Teachers: Parachuitists Behind the Lines May Be in Need of a Chaplain. Beyond the Looking Glass Papers from a National Symposium on Teacher Education Policies, Practices and Research, edited by Shirley M. Hord, Sharon F. O'Neil and Mark Smith. The Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, The Universty of Texas at Austin, 1985.